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THE CONVERSATION

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Manifesto Check: SNP fails to recognise the potential of sport

AUTHORS



Grant Jarvie

Chair of Sport at University of Edinburgh



Paul Widdop

Research Fellow in Cultural and Sport Sociology at Leeds Beckett University



The SNP manifesto only mentions sports in two places. Chris Radburn/PA

It is worth noting that sport in Scotland, as in Wales, is a devolved function. At the heart of the Scottish National Party's election manifesto is the relationship between the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. Sport is only mentioned twice in the 40 page document, dedicating it two sentences in total. And yet there are so many places where it could, and should, have been mentioned.

One of the two things that the SNP argues for in its manifesto is that Scotland should have a greater say in the sports events that are included on the list of sport content which is free to view in Scotland. This is part of a bigger struggle to move responsibility for broadcasting in Scotland from Westminster to the Scottish parliament.

The manifesto also promises to promote a more active lifestyle through sport. This they should be commended upon, as health remains a **significant challenge** in Scotland. And we know that running, recreational football and swimming have a particularly **positive impact** on health.

Sport's crucial role

In comparison to Plaid Cymru's manifesto which specifically states that they will promote sport for all groups, genders, and abilities, the SNP says nothing on sporting inequalities in Scotland. In a specific section on inequality in their manifesto, it mentions only women and the need for 50:50 quotas on boards, but leaves out other potentially marginalised groups in society.

The manifesto also commits to narrowing the educational attainment gap, but omits to mention the link between physical activity and educational attainment. And nowhere does the manifesto mention tackling two prominent sources of inequality in participation; namely class and geography. Without tackling these issues, there is a real risk of masking the growing polarisation in the consumption of sport between the classes.

The manifesto could also have mentioned that the sport and related industries sector in Scotland accounted for 35,880 jobs, making it a significant employer in 2013, ahead of civil engineering and the legal profession. The minimum or living wage remains a very important issue for the SNP, yet nothing is forthcoming in the manifesto in relation to sport. Yet, a precedent has been set by Heart of Midlothian, who were the first football club in Scotland and one of the few in the UK to commit to a living wage.

Lack of acknowledgement

Perhaps the Minister for Sport and the Minister for International Development should talk to each other, to harness the soft power of sport far beyond Scotland's shores. Sport for development which only focuses upon development in Scotland and not international development is only a job half done.

In a country that helped to bring the Homeless World Cup into being, it would be unfortunate to forget the historical link between sport, poverty and social mobility in Scotland and create more pathways.

The SNP also pleads for safer streets and communities, but fails to acknowledge the place of sport in contributing to social cohesion, crime reduction and the conditions necessary to support higher levels of sports participation, especially amongst girls.

On the question of sport and physical activity, Stronger for Scotland fails to reinforce many of the arguments that were seen to be so important to the 53-page long McLeish Report into sport in an independent Scotland. In a manifesto that wanted to place such an emphasis on reaching out to communities, there is a silence on the now recognised international role that sport now has in relation to humanitarian aid, peace and conflict resolution. This is indeed worrying, but perhaps these concerns will be addressed ahead of the Scottish elections in 2016.

The Conversation's Manifesto Check deploys academic expertise to scrutinise the parties' plans.